

FIRSTLY, SECONDLY

by Yisroel Shtern (1922)

Translated from the Yiddish by Miri Koral (2010)

Love-struck twilight tumbled down. On the hill stands night,
in both its hands – the storm.

The stillness of the rivers drowned itself from shame -
their fresh red tongue by the darkness torn.

Mute distances cry out how far the night has spread,
dousing any desired aid.

My heart will tumble out, close the windows.

Dusk's fragrance wafting over his palate sweetly,
the fisherman, gold-remnants in his eyes, yet holds his net,
pulling out...his full-grown image, black and thirsty.

We mirror ourselves in the storm.

Clouds scream deeply, seven-heavens deep,
as in the night we fall in over our heads
letting slip dark crimson childhood from our arms...

Freezing winds pierce the firmament's tender skin.

My heart will escape, close the windows.

Shadows wrap loneliness in cooled cloths like a child,
lead it to the hazy border between field and dusk,
where trees live bent

under the yoke of too much silence kept...

So we close our eyes – swing, swing evening-wind!

We squeeze our eyelids tight: flecks...specks...dance...float...

Life is a sleep arrayed in colors hurrying for a stroll –

So who is knocking on the farthest gate?

And if we open ourselves up:

the regretful-blue-embracing earth and sky
slashes our throats in a flash.

The streams flow like bloody veins, enticing to deep wet graves
people and their yearning.

Our red eyes swim into the distance, where the darkest edge
is already thundering night's song

and the first stars laugh

meanly

with hollow silver eyes.
Roofs have nowhere to hide,
and tearing pieces from themselves,
throw sacrifices to the storm...

And my heart? – Close the windows!

How can one be alone?
The storm is here, and Mankind's in the storm - and as distant from itself
as clouds – from heaven...

Is someone still below?
Earths clasp storms onto their shoulders, while man is distant from himself,
a lifted wing...how can one be alone?
How can one be a stone, the stone's no stone, the stone is hot -
cooking sweet cobblestones of blood.

Who lives alone these days?
In angst-sweat, solitudes run up the spiral staircase of the wind
to scorch, in the flaming horizon, hands emptied of tears --
maybe their guilt hangs there...

How can one be alone and clean and deep? - The crystal of a river calls
to its sandy edge - where someone stands weeping
in envy of the fish...

The hearts' outpouring has broken its banks.
They stand - dawn and noon and evening - up to their bellies in flood.
The stillness sails this way and the boat heaves...
How can one be alone?
In the dream dreams the storm, like an iron tongue
in a silver bell...

Twilights awaken the silk of their daydream,
and tear themselves from their blue bed with a cry: dark clouds draw near
and we're going under!

Who is alone now?
On the tired matted panes night falls like a curse.
Never before has it bared such a great wild mane.
The windows shudder, skinny frail white frames disintegrate.
In the darkness the walls cave, hung with heavy shadows,

like pictures
of dead loved ones. Who lives alone these days?

Ed.: Khaliastre, 1er Almanakh, Warsaw 1922. (Published in 1955 with book title "Close the Windows")